

Hovering Cerulean Kingfishers *Alcedo coerulescens*

S. (BAS) VAN BALEN

The Cerulean Kingfisher *Alcedo coerulescens* is a rather common kingfisher in coastal areas of Java, Madura, Bali and the western Lesser Sundas (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993, White and Bruce 1986; van Balen in prep.). Its diet consists mainly of water crustacea, insects and vertebrates (Sody 1989) and the species is exclusively seen on perches near mangrove creeks, mudflats, fishponds, etc., from which it dives after prey. However, it is frequently seen diving from a hovering position at 2-4 m above the water surface, where it hangs completely still for several to 30 or more seconds. Often the hovering is broken off without a dive, after which the bird veers back to a perch.

The Cerulean Kingfisher frequents open habitats, where it often sits on low perches. Hovering expands the species's fishing territories to areas where these perches are scarce; moreover, during windy weather with choppy water surface, hovering seems to enable the birds to prey on fish above open water (Fry *et al.* 1992). Its small size may make it more suitable for hovering, whereas larger species in the same habitat (e.g. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis*) may have problems because of a less favourable wing-load or other anatomical reasons.

Many members of the family Alcedinidae are forest dwellers, where hovering is made unnecessary by the availability of perches. Other species are able to take food items other than fish from the ground (*Halcyon* spp.). Hovering has therefore been described only for a few species of kingfishers, i.e. the largely piscivorous species that inhabit open areas, such as the cerylid kingfishers (Fry *et al.* 1992). Hovering as a feeding technique was only briefly mentioned for the Cerulean Kingfisher by Holmes

and Nash (1989). Biological differences between Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Blue-eared Kingfisher *A. meninting*, a greater proportion of fish (Fry *et al.* 1992) and more open habitat for the first species (van Balen and van Balen 1992) is expressed in occasional hovering reported for this and no hovering for the latter.

Despite the intensive utilization of large part of the coastal belt of northern Java and southern Madura, with hardly any natural habitat left in the endless stretches of shrimp and salt ponds, devoid of vegetation and perches, the Cerulean Kingfisher is still very common. Perhaps its hovering technique allows it to utilize these new food sources and habitats. The rather recent and successful expansion of the species in south Sumatra and Lampung (van Marle and Voous 1988) may have been supported by the local boom of shrimp ponds in recent years.

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S. (Bas) van Balen, BirdLife International – Indonesia Programme, P.O. Box 310/Boo, Bogor 16003, and Department of Nature Conservation, Wageningen Agricultural University, P.O. Box 8080, 6700 DD, Wageningen, the Netherlands

More birds feeding on arils of acacia seeds

S. (BAS) VAN BALEN

The feeding of Plain Sunbirds *Anthreptes simplex* on the aril seeds of *Acacia* was reported by Ford (1995). These arils are often bright in colour and contain high concentrations of fat and protein (Glyphis *et al.* 1981). The present paper describes the observation of white-eyes feeding their young with acacia arils.

On the morning of 24 April 1991, following a tempest the night before, I found a young (pre-fledging) Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus buxtoni* that had fallen from its nest in a large lengkung *Euphorbia longan* tree in front of my house at Bantarpeuteuy, Bogor, West Java. The bird had a lame leg, and therefore I had put in a bird cage suspended in a tree in my back garden. Immediately, a flock of eight

loudly protesting white-eyes appeared and perched during a few minutes on a branch close to the cage. Two parent birds stayed behind and appeared to have rows of four or five, bright orange, worm-shaped, 1 cm long objects in their bills. They left and returned to the cage several times and in vain offered the food to the young bird through the narrow cage mesh. After I had opened the cage door, the young bird disappeared quickly to join the parents. On inspection of the food remains near the cage, I realised that what had appeared to be worms were actually the arils from an *Acacia auriculiformis* tree that was fruiting copiously in my garden.

The feeding of arils has never been reported before for white-eyes nor for any other Javan birds (Sody 1989).

Neither are there any orange-coloured larvae or worms on Java with which I might have confused the arils.

The Oriental White-eye is one of the few birds that can survive perfectly well in the urbanized parts of Java. Foraging flocks can be observed in trees in the busiest places, such as bus terminals or shopping streets (pers. obs.). Whereas white-eyes did not occur fifty years ago in the city of Jakarta (Hoogerwerf and Siccama 1938, Hoogerwerf 1948), they have been observed near Blok M (Jakarta City) in May 1988 (pers. obs.) and certainly have a much wider distribution now. Their adaptability is proved again as they take the exotic *Acacia auriculiformis* as food. The tree is native to the Key Islands, New Guinea and Australia, and is locally cultivated as an ornamental tree in gardens (Backer and van den Brink 1963), but in the past few decades more and more are being used to line roads and furnish city parks. Ironically, the municipality of Jakarta decided against continuing to plant acacia trees

because it was presumed that they were unattractive to birds.

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S. (Bas) van Balen, BirdLife International – Indonesia Programme, P.O. Box 310/Boo, Bogor 16003, and Department of Nature Conservation, Wageningen Agricultural University, P.O. Box 8080, 6700 DD, Wageningen, the Netherlands

Unusual food item and declining numbers at only known regular wintering site of Relict Gull *Larus relictus*

NIAL C. MOORES, W. (TED) HOOGENDOORN, JIN HAN KIM and JIN YOUNG PARK

On 23 February 1995, between 13h30 and 16h00, we observed six Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* (four adults in winter plumage and two first-winters) in the Nakdong estuary, Pusan City, Republic of Korea. The birds were feeding on a tidal mudflat c. 500 m north of Daema island and were observed from this island, which is located c. 1 km south of the part of the mainland between the Nakdong and Jukrim rivers.

Being aware of the scarcity of documentation of Relict Gull feeding behaviour in winter, we were particularly interested in observing the feeding strategy and diet items of the species. Typically, the birds walked slowly over the drier areas of mudflat, occasionally entering the water, apparently taking small crustaceans and other miscellaneous items. Their walking pace was noticeably slower and more careful than of the other gulls feeding on the mudflat, particularly Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus* and Saunders's Gulls *L. saundersi*, but at range it was difficult to identify food items. In order to obtain better views of Relict Gull feeding behaviour, we approached by boat within 80 m of one of the adults. Much to our amusement, this individual started to peck at an apple core, as if to serve us hand and foot. Perhaps considering it a crustacean, the bird picked up the apple core, flew up to a height of c. 6 m, and dropped it. It then swooped down and quickly pecked at several of the remains, apparently taking these as food. This prey-dropping behaviour had been observed on previous visits by NCM to the same site

in February 1992, and it was also noted by Chalmers (1992). The observation described here appears to be the first documented incidence of a Relict Gull feeding on fruit.

Until now this particular site is the only known regular wintering site of Relict Gull in the world (*cf.* Duff *et al.* 1991, Sonobe 1993). Unfortunately, recently it has become extremely difficult to approach this site from the mainland side, due to land reclamation works. David Diskin (pers. comm.) observed seven individuals at the same site in early February 1995. Apparently, numbers of wintering Relict Gulls have declined here after the onset of land reclamation, since Chalmers (1992) and NCM recorded at least 36 on 4 February 1992 and 32 on 12 February 1992. This is a most alarming situation.

The importance of this site is further enhanced by its wintering flock of Saunders's Gulls, of which we observed c. 125 individuals here, and on the south side of Daema island. Saunders's Gull is one of the rarest gull species of the world and both its known breeding colonies and its known major wintering sites are either being reclaimed or under threat of reclamation (Brazil and Moores 1993, Collar *et al.* 1994).

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